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ABSTRACT

To address the issue of implementing research findings in the schools, 26 teachers enrolled in a graduate seminar in teaching reading applied research findings in their classrooms. Their instructor visited their classrooms and used her observations as discussion starters for the seminar, during which they also discussed assigned readings. They then wrote reaction papers, which were intended to sharpen their critiquing abilities and writing skills. Data from these projects, used as the basis of their graduate action-research projects, are largely anecdotal and focus, by category, on the following: (1) schema theory--discussing pictures before reading a story to activate students' schemata (first grade); (2) story grammar--using a story framework to develop a book report format (eighth grade); (3) writing--recording responses to reading in a journal (first and second grades); (4) directed reading activity (DRA)--using DRAs with remedial students when reading their own stories (elementary); and (5) teaching special populations--developing a program for remedial readers, including whole language, silent reading, and journal writing (high school). Participants in the courses indicated very positive responses to the three course components (class sessions, in-school observations, and reaction papers) in an end-of-year survey. Both the changes made by these teachers/students in their classrooms and their positive reactions to the course components indicate that graduate courses for practitioners connecting theory to practice and carrying a field component in which instructors visit their students' classrooms are recommended. References, a course evaluation survey, and a follow-up survey are appended. (LLZ)

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Reading Practices in the Schools: Linking Theory with Practice

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Reading Practices in the Schools:

Linking Theory with Practice

A major problem in education has been the implementation of research findings in the schools. In 1984, as a commitment to meet a new NASDTEC standard to focus on teaching developmental reading in school settings, I taught a graduate reading practicum in a new format. Instead of having graduate students teach small groups of children on campus, I visited them in their classrooms and used the results of my observations as discussion starters in our seminar meetings. Often suggestions for change were offered by the group and instructor. For our course readings, we were concentrating on the new research from the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois (Duffy, Roehler & Mason, 1984) and its practical applications (McNeil, 1984). These texts, along with outside readings and class lectures, provided the sources for their suggestions.

As the term progressed, it became evident that these teachers were making changes in their programs as a result of our visits and class discussions. Since participants wrote reaction papers to each seminar session, they became critical reviewers and better writers in the process. These reaction papers, my field notes, and student surveys provided a rich data pool for investigating the effect of this course on the teachers' classroom practices. Moreover, many of the graduate students in this practicum course continued working with me in their research and graduate project course. Many of them selected some of the new practices they had introduced in the fall as the topics for their graduate projects. They began conducting action research to evaluate these new approaches. It appeared that a link was being established between theory and practice, and these teachers were becoming teacher-researchers in very real, practical situations.

The course format was replicated in 1985 and a follow-up survey of the participants added to the data pool. This paper proposes to synthesize the

information collected to begin to answer the broad question: Will a course which includes on-site observations of graduate students and subsequent class discussions with the intent to offer suggestions for change, based on current research, affect reading practices in the schools?

Procedures

The participants in this study, 26 teachers from six New Jersey counties surrounding William Paterson College, were graduate students in reading enrolled in the course RLA 623 Practicum in Teaching Reading. Except for two who worked as regular substitutes, all were contracted, classroom teachers. While most worked in elementary schools, two taught preschool, three taught grades seven and eight, and five taught in high schools.

During the fall semesters of 1984 and 1985, our class met once a week for a two and a half hour seminar in which one student's program and sample lessons were described in depth and reacted to by peers. As the course instructor, I arranged to visit the school prior to the class review so that I could help reconstruct what actually went on in the developmental and/or corrective reading groups. These school visits took from two to three hours of observation time since the reading groups usually ran from 45 to 70 minutes, and, in most cases, two groups were observed at each school .

Brief evaluative sessions were held on the spot in the schools after each lesson, and both the class members and instructor subsequently wrote reaction papers for each presenter. This activity was intended to sharpen the critiquing abilities and writing skills of the Reading Specialists-in-training and to serve as a blueprint for change for the presenter. The weekly reaction papers were scored holistically by the instructor to provide the students with feedback on their reportorial and critiquing efforts.

Since writing reactions based only on one's own experiences can lead to narrow and undimensional viewpoints, students read two texts to provide a breadth

of background on teaching reading. Comprehension Instruction (Longman, 1984) by Duffy, Roehler, and Mason presented the findings of research over the past five years at the Center for the Study of Reading (CSR) at the University of Illinois and the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) at Michigan State University. Reading Comprehension: New Directions for Classroom Practice (Scott-Foresman, 1984) by John McNeil was a paperback that offered teaching strategies, many of which were based on the research reported in the Duffy et al. text. These two texts offered a balance of theory and practice, and students were encouraged to refer to these sources when they were writing reactions. For example, P. David Pearson's categories for questions developed over reading materials could be discussed as class members reacted to their peers' questioning techniques.

At the end of each semester, course evaluation surveys were completed (Appendix A), and two months after the completion of the 1985 course, follow-up surveys (Appendix B) were completed by teachers enrolled in the courses.

Data Sources and Treatment

Field notes kept by the researcher and participants' reaction papers, and end-of-term evaluation surveys, follow-up surveys and some of the teachers' action research projects provided the data for this descriptive report. Since the main focus was the translating of research in reading into classroom practice, the broad research categories that seemed to surface from these sources will form the framework in which the results will be reported. The research categories are: Schema Theory, Story Grammar, Writing, Directed Reading, and Teaching Special Populations (ESL, Remedial, Special Education). They will be described as they are met in the narrative that follows.

Under the category headings, I will first draw from field notes and graduate action research projects to describe how theory and practice melded during the seminar semesters. Then I will report the results of the end-of-term and follow-up surveys to show how the teachers perceive the impact of their knowledge about the research areas on their continuing teaching practices.

Findings: Class Observations and Action Research Projects

Table 1 summarizes the number of times the research categories were the main focus of classroom observations and subsequent action research projects. Because of the large amount of anecdotal data available, only a sampling of the class visit happenings will be reported for each category to document the theory-into-practice phenomenon. All the related action projects will be included in the discussions.

Table 1

Number of Classroom observations and Action Research Projects by Research Category

Category	Main Focus of Classroom Observation	Topic of Action Research
Schema Theory	8	2
Story Grammar	3	3
Writing	3	2
Directed Reading	9	3
Special Populations	3	5
Total	26	15*

*Although there were 26 participants in the practicum course, not all have begun their graduate research projects as of this writing.

Schema Theory

According to the schema theory, what you already know about a topic (your schemata) helps you to comprehend what you are reading. This theory has been developed through numerous studies done at the Center for the Study of Reading during the past decade (Adams and Collins, 1977; Anderson, 1977). In our seminars we discussed this theory and its implications early in the term, so it was not surprising to find several teachers engaged in "schema activation" practices like sematic webbing (McNeil, 1984, Chapter 2) or direct in-putting of needed concepts (Langer, 1984) before having students read a text. According to Table 1, this category was the focus of class observations eight times and was chosen for further study by two participants. Some examples follow.

One preschool teacher had her four-year-olds make play dough gingerbread "cookies" with rolling pins and paper bag puppets with big, round "raisin eyes" before she read the old folktale, The Gingerbread Boy. When she came to reading about how the old woman rolled the dough to make a Gingerbread Boy with "raisin eyes," they knew exactly what she was talking about. A third grade teacher had her low reading group do a sematic map of what they knew about elephants and tigers before they read an animal fantasy tale. This means they told her everything they knew about the two animals as she wrote the ideas in clustered form on the board. Of course, many of the "new" reading words came up and were prominent in their minds before they went to the text. She was thrilled when they read the story easily, exhibiting good comprehension.

During some classroom observations, I found teachers who needed help to know when and how to use schema activation. One teacher of nine to twelve-year-old classified students was using a primary-level basal reader exactly according to the manual. These older children could bring a great deal of global knowledge to their processing of these simple texts, but she wasn't tapping it. After a brief demonstration of how one could use the text pictures and a little discussion to activate schemata, the teacher tried it herself and was surprised at how much more fluently they read.

A similar situation arose with a compensatory education teacher who works with one or two children at a time on a pull-out basis. As I observed two first-graders struggling, letter by letter and word by word, through a comic-like story about a whale who catches a cold, I suggested she stop to discuss the picture before they read the next page. We identified everything depicted on the ocean floor drawing, from sea life such as a crab and a lobster to debris such as old tires and a castaway piano. Predictably, all the items figured in the following text and the children were able to read with minimal attention to graphic cues because their expectations were piqued, and they were reading for story line rather than for decoding letters into sounds.

In another instance, a high school social studies teacher had his below-level tenth-graders research the lives and accomplishments of some of the major early explorers of the American continent before he began a unit of study on the beginnings of American history. On the day I visited, they read their reports in class. Of course, the reports were brief and sounded as though they had been copied straight from an encyclopedia. When we discussed this approach in our seminar session, this teacher's peers were quick to suggest that had the students first been introduced to the explorers and their travels through class activities, they would have had the background knowledge to read and write reports that they could understand.

These were some examples of the eight classroom observations that had schema theory as their major focus. Next I will report the main findings of two action research projects growing out of this theory.

Aware of her colleague's findings of significant prior knowledge bias in the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Willging, 1984), Wehrle (1985) studied the effect of specific content knowledge on college students' performance on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT). Unlike the Nelson-Denny (N-D) which uses reading passages based on a comprehensive high school curriculum (for example, literature, science, history), the NJCBSPT requires students to read and answer questions on paragraphs about everyday, general interest topics such as women's rights and favorite foods. During their freshman skills reading course, Wehrle had the experimental group read supplemental articles based on the topics of the NJCBSPT while the control group read placebo articles. Although both groups gained from pre-to post-test, the experimental group, which was exposed to the content of the test topics, did not score significantly higher than did the control group. Having hypothesized in this direction, Wehrle noted that the general nature of the NJCBSPT would probably control for the prior knowledge bias that Willing found in the Nelson-Denny.

Gansley (1985) wanted to see if directly taught terms and procedures (specific schematic knowledge) would affect first-graders' performance on a self-teaching, drill and practice computer program designed to improve literal comprehension. Her experimental group received direct instruction in the terms used in the software and were led through teacher-directed model lessons before going to the computer. The control group used the computer program with only the introduction suggested by the teacher's manual. As predicted, the experimental group did significantly better on the criterion-referenced exercises for the first three sessions. However, a trend in the scores of the control group showed that as they used the program, they tended to build up a knowledge base which enabled them to do better than in earlier tries but still not as good as their peers who were directly given the specific schematic information.

Both of these teacher-researchers had been exposed to schema theory research in the practicum seminars and subsequent course in research in reading.

Story Grammar

The work of Mandler and Johnson (1977), Stein and Glenn (1979), and Whaley (1981) suggest that stories have an underlying structure that may be called a "story grammar." The components of one simple grammar are: setting (including characters and place), initiating event, internal response, major actions, outcomes. Researchers in this area, which is really an outgrowth of schema theory, say that if children are exposed to the elements of story by being read to and by having story elements pointed out to them as they begin to read stories, they will comprehend narratives better. They will have a frame of reference from which to anticipate and predict as they proceed through a story. As seen in Table 1, this area was the focus of three classroom observations and three action research projects.

My visit to a teacher of four- and five-year-olds in a private school in a predominantly black area revealed that she had implemented the story grammar research in an innovative way. She used a story grammar framework as a guide to

help children retell the stories she read to them and to help them compose stories orally. Many of these children came from homes in which reading to children received a low priority, consequently their concept of story was particularly underdeveloped.

Carrying this work over to her graduate project Rindner (1985) designed an experiment to see if her story grammar teaching strategies were having an effect on her students' listening-retelling and oral composing abilities. Using one reading-retelling episode and one oral composition as pre-tests, she continued her story grammar program for six weeks before she again analyzed retelling and composing scores. The post-program measures indicated that the children's ability to retell stories was significantly improved as was their ability to tell original stories .

A compensatory education teacher of grades six through eight adapted questioning strategies based on story grammar research to help her below-level students read short stories. It was a pleasure to observe her use her new technique to guide her students through a story with a very tangled plot. Delighted with her own application of this research area, for her graduate project she is presently studying the effect of narrative text structure on reader's comprehension (Miller, in progress). Her students are reading some stories that follow a predictable story grammar and some which do not, in counterbalanced order; she is hypothesizing that comprehension scores will be higher for those narratives that are clearly structured according to a story grammar.

An eighth-grade teacher in our sample carried the story grammar research over to her teaching of literature, ultimately developing a book report format based on a simple story grammar. Subsequently, in her graduate project, Frei (1985) found that while direct instruction in story grammar elements did not appreciably affect her students' comprehension as measured by publisher developed tests, their book report grades did improve. She reported that they had seemed to

internalize story structure, and this helped them to write more fully developed book reports.

Writing Research

No current course in teaching reading can avoid including what is happening in writing research. The writing-as process movement, as exemplified by the work of Donald Graves (1983, 1985) and Lucy Calkins (1983, 1985), has been sweeping the nation's schools. They have shown that writing can proceed naturally from oral language to a "publishable piece." Children need to talk first, then draft, revise after conferencing, then edit (with teacher or peer help), finally moving their pieces into a standard form that can be read by others. Children develop a sense of "audience," as they write for specific readers rather than to fulfill a teacher's assignment. They begin to "read like writers" (Feeley, 1985), improving reading comprehension because they understand the communication process. They write reactions and questions in logs or journals; the writing component helps them to organize information for themselves, thus aiding comprehension and learning. While three observations focussed on writing activities, two participants elected to pursue their action research projects in the writing area (Table 1).

One third grade teacher was conducting a routine, three-group basal reader program at the start of our course. During my visit to her class I showed her how she could begin a writing program with at least one group, complete with writing folders, posted teacher conference times, child-to-child conferences, and blank books for the children to "author." She chose to begin with her lowest reading group and made this writing component the topic of her graduate project the following semester. According to objective measures, the children in the writing group grew in reading and writing achievement, but what was even more important, they grew in self esteem as they read their stories to each other and to the rest of the class, viewing themselves as producers of print to be read by others as well as readers of what others have written (Boyce, 1985).

Another teacher of a mixed first and second grade class combined writing with her literature program. The day I visited, she read McCloskey's Blueberries for Sal to the class, and they wrote responses in their reading journals. While most of the first-graders merely retold one or two major events, some of the second graders related incidents from their own lives (like getting separated from mother) to the story plot. The writing activity was moving them from reporting to interacting. During writing time, the children composed group and individual letters to Robert McClosky, one of their favorite authors. This young teacher had definitely turned her classroom into a reading-writing, process-oriented center.

A fifth-grade teacher in a rural school bemoaned the fact that the basals in use in her school district had little to offer in the reading of poetry. She supplemented the basals with poems by Shel Silverstein and other contemporary poets. The figurative language lesson she planned for my visit was impressive. Students could discuss metaphors, similes, and other poetic devices; they talked about what made poetry, "special." For her graduate project, this teacher chose to study the effect of the explicit teaching of figurative language on children's comprehension of poetry (O'Connor, 1985). The focus on poetry naturally led to their writing poems; as they learned about figures of speech, they begun to manipulate language and to create word pictures with figurative language. While her lessons had no effect on standardized test scores, her students became budding poets, with an anthology of class poems to their credit by the end of the project.

Directed Reading

The Directed Reading Activity (DRA) has been the cornerstone of basal reader methodology. Just about all the basal reader manuals outline the same sequence: teach "new" words, discuss the text to be read, read it together (although the manuals frequently suggest silent then oral reading, most groups can be observed reading orally in round-robin fashion), and do follow-up exercises (usually workbook or dittos).

Researchers at the CSR have been recommending a more active approach to developing reading comprehension by having students predict, ask questions, and react as they go through text. Russell Stauffer's (1981) Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) is a modification of the DRA that encourages this interactive approach. Pearson (1984) and others at the CSR suggest that teachers model this approach as they read whole texts (not just short, skills-centered pieces) with their students in large or small group settings.

Research on questions that follow text reading has also shed new light on comprehension (Raphael, 1986). Students need to be made aware of where the information needed to answer questions may lie. Describing the Pearson and Johnson (1978) model which classifies questions as text explicit (information is in the text), text implicit (information is implied by text but is not stated "in the lines"), and scriptal (not in or suggested by text, but rather in the reader's schemata), Raphael suggests that children can be taught to think accordingly about Question Answer Relationships (QARs) and that this metacognitive knowledge will help them to answer questions better and, ultimately, improve comprehension.

This research on promoting active reading of whole texts through the DRTA and attention to QARs had a big impact on the teachers in this study. (According to Table 1, this area was the focus of nine observations). Most were using basal readers and sticking closely to the manual recommendations. In our seminar sessions, we began to question the relevancy of some of the procedures found in the manuals and some of the content in current basals. Next, I will report on a sampling of these observations.

A reading teacher in an elementary school who taught small groups of remedial students switched from using basals to high interest articles from children's magazines. The day I visited, the group read a mystery story about the theft of school property by a student. The children readily began to predict who

the culprit was and how he would be caught as they read through the piece silently, stopping to check on predictions as they went along. When it came to a few comprehension questions at the end, they were able to tell me which ones could be answered "right there" (explicit), "think and search" (implicit), and "from your head" (scriptal); they were "in control" of the exercise to a degree that is unusual for remedial students.

This teacher carried her interest in DRA vs. DRTA over to her graduate project. Now she is teaching Limited English Proficient (LEP) students to read English and is questioning the recommendation of English-as-a-Second-Language Teachers that LEPs need to read everything orally to comprehend. Firm in her belief in the importance of making meaning for oneself via the DRTA, she set up an experiment in which one group followed in DRA with all reading done orally and another similar group following the DRTA, reading silently with interactive discussion. While there was no difference in the groups' abilities to answer text-explicit questions, the students in the silent-reading/DRTA group answered significantly more inferential or text-implicit questions (Valenza, 1986).

During my visit to a grade three teacher in a rural area, I found that she was using a basal reader as prescribed by the manual with 20 average and above-average readers in a whole group setting. Although some needed the skill work, many of these children clearly did not, finishing worksheets quickly with nothing to do while waiting for the others. At our seminar session, we suggested she form two groups so that instruction might be more evenly paced. While the faster readers worked on their own and extended their comprehension activities by writing in reading journals, she could work with the slower group, going in and out of text and teaching skills in context as needed. This teacher did change her procedures, selecting skill work only for those demonstrating need and using a DRTA with all students but working more directly with the slower group.

One participant in this study was teaching first grade for the first time. The district had just introduced a new basal series, and the message she had received from the administration was to do everything as directed in the manual. I arrived one day late in October to find that she was still in the beginning portion of the readiness book, working on the single phoneme /k/. The children were listening for /k/, identifying the letter, and reading "k" words on cards. At no time did they get a chance to read connected text; in fact, they really were not reading at all.

While she called a group to the back of the room to work on "k" words, I taught the rest of the class the Halloween poem "There's a Goblin in Lives in our House." After we said it several times together, I wrote it on large chart paper at the front of the room. The children took turns reading it and locating words and phrases that I had printed on strips for them to play "match-ups." The teacher was amazed, saying that she thought that they were not ready to read yet. One boy who was in the group with the teacher surprised everybody reading the whole poem; he said his mother had taught him to read at home. And, if it weren't for the poem, the only "reading" he would have done in school that day was the letter"k"!

This conscientious young teacher in a poor, urban area was anxious to discuss her program with us in seminar. She learned a great deal through my class visit and our seminar session, beginning with the tenet, "You learn to read by reading." Moving quickly through the readiness book, she got her children into reading whole stories, supplementing them with poems, songs, and experience stories she wrote with the children about things they did in school. This course came at just the right time for her and her students.

For their graduate projects, three students who used basal readers extensively in their teaching, chose to study certain aspects of basals. Meakin (1985) looked at primary level basals to see if the Dolch List of basic sight words, developed in the 1940s, was still useful. She had been using it as a diagnostic tool in grade three but wondered about its relevance in the 1980s. Concluding that it

was

still useful, she found that the words on the list made up 76% of the running words in the readiness to grade three readers in four widely used basal series.

Graham (1985) wondered if teaching prefixes would improve middle-graders' vocabulary. (Usually, middle-grade basals feature skill lessons on prefix meanings, but too often these elements are not placed in full context, and the lessons can become mere rote learning with little transfer to whole text reading). She found that while the teaching of prefix meanings improved students' performance on a teacher-made test on prefixes, it did not affect their performance on the vocabulary subtest of a standardized test. She concluded that skill elements like prefixes are best taught in context with students finding examples as they occur naturally in whole texts that they are reading. Teachers who model the use of word parts as they encounter prefixed words in context would seem to be making a direct application of the CSR research on developing reading strategies.

Koch (1986) is presently studying the manuals that accompany the primary books in two leading basal series to find out how writing is incorporated in their reading programs. Since the CSR research suggests that reading is a constructive, active process, just as is composing, it seems germane to include writing (composing) in a total reading program; it is hoped that today's basals will reflect this view and the writing-as-process research of the past decade.

Teaching Special Populations

Many reading teachers are faced with the daily assignment of moving special populations of students toward literacy. While some are teaching LEP students at all levels, others are working with Special Education, Remedial, or Compensatory Education Students in high school who are still not reading and writing on levels acceptable for graduation or minimal job-related requirements. These teachers need exposure to the literature on literacy development for students at all levels. Besides the research on schema theory, text structure, writing-as-process, and direct teaching of strategies, these teachers need to understand the important role

that interest can play. According to Harris and Sipay (1985) good remedial teaching is really good developmental teaching with close attention to individual needs and interests. Three participants whose interest lies with teaching special groups will be discussed next.

One high school reading teacher in our course was using workbooks and dittos designed for use in the elementary school with her LEP students. During my visit, I found students to be bored and disinterested. I encouraged this teacher to try whole texts, written at lower difficulty levels, dealing with teenagers and their problems; these children need to take books home to try for themselves and to write out responses in logs or journals. I suggested that she could also help them read texts for other courses; they had some background from class sessions but needed help to deal with the printed materials.

This teacher did make changes, and she decided to make her own program the topic of her graduate project. She tested the effectiveness of her program by looking at the gains in the Minimum Basic Skills test made by two groups of her students. A remedial group went from 62.29 to 81.3 (p .02) while an LEP group went from 49.5 to 61.3 (p .01); although her program was not the only factor in the achievement of these special groups, she knew that it must have played a major part (Kushner, 1985).

Another high school teacher of reading was faced with similar problems: teaching Special Education and classified students who were still reading at elementary levels. When I visited her classes, I observed bored teenagers reading aloud from skill sheets and looking up lists of "vocabulary" words to learn spellings and definitions for a weekly test. Despite our class sessions that stressed schema theory and whole language activities, she continued in time-honored ways, believing that this was all you could do with these "special" kids. Suggesting that she encourage more silent reading for meaning, written reactions in journals, and the study of vocabulary taken from "real" reading situations, I left wondering about how our work might affect this special population.

This teacher, too, selected her own program to study for her graduate project. Refocussing her teaching, she concentrated on whole language, individualized activities like silent reading of high interest stories, the keeping of writing journals, and personalized vocabulary lists of words met in context. She chose to track the progress of four students who had been in and out of various placements throughout their high school years but ended up with her for their last year in school. While the four made modest gains on standardized tests, they grew significantly in their attitude toward, and interest in, reading as assessed by an attitude measure. They went from showing no interest to attending to and responding to valuing reading (Kovach, 1985). These findings were reward enough for this conscientious teacher.

Another participant, who planned to work eventually in a clinic setting, chose to study how college reading clinics operate. Preininger (1985) surveyed eight college clinics in New Jersey and described how, when, and where clients are served and how they are referred. She also outlined what materials and methods were most used and what support services were offered. This report was deemed an important contribution to the reading literature and accepted for inclusion in the ERIC database (ED-259-299).

This section has reported a sampling of the class observations and action research projects under the five research area categories that emerged from the field notes and reaction paper.

Results of Participants' Surveys

To evaluate the effectiveness of course, participants were surveyed at the end of the term in which they took the course and again two months after the second group had finished. Selected findings of these surveys will be reported next.

End-of-Term Surveys

In December, 1984, and December, 1985, students were asked to respond to the value of the course components on a five -point scale (5 = Extremely Helpful to

1 = Not Helpful). They were also asked to indicate the degree of change (5 = Very Great to 1 = Not at All) in their perceptions and instructional procedures that they thought the course may have had. Tables 2 and 3 show the results.

Table 2

Course Components: Means and Standard Deviations 1984 & 1985

Component	1984 N = 14	1985 N = 12
Class Sessions	4.43 (.73)	4.41 (.67)
In-school	4.57 (.73)	4.50 (.94)
Writing Reaction Papers	3.57 (1.18)	3.90 (.94)

Both years the class sessions were rated 4.4 or Very to Extremely Helpful. Many commented that they enjoyed the exchange with their peers, welcoming the chance to learn what other schools were doing and to share what they were doing. As the instructor, I tried to tie their research readings to their teaching situations; this was easier to do once I had started to visit the schools. I tried to encourage group participation, with peers suggesting areas for change, rather than being the "authority" to whom teachers would always turn for guidance.

The visit to their classrooms rated the highest (4.5) in both 1984 and 1985. Most were happy to have an "outsider" visit them and provide feedback on what they were doing day to day. since most were tenured, seasoned teachers who have mastered classroom control and organization, they rarely were visited by supervisors and welcomed a chance to receive constructive reactions.

Writing the weekly reaction paper was respectively rated 3.5 and 3.9 (Helpful to Very Helpful). While they found it a chore, several students said that they welcomed the opportunity to practice their writing and critiquing skills. I noticed that the writing style and content of the papers improved over the months.

Table 3

Perceptions of Reading Theory and Practice: Degree of Change

Question	1984 N = 14	1985 N = 12
To what degree do you think...		
1. Your perceptions about reading comprehension have changed?	4.00 (.79)	4.08 (1.16)
2. Your instructional practices have changed?	3.50 (1.35)	4.41 (.67)

For the two years, respondents thought that their perceptions about reading comprehension had changed Greatly (4.0). As for teaching practices, the first group thought they had changed To Some Degree+ (3.5), while the second group indicated a greater degree of change -- 4.4 or Greatly to Very Greatly. Some commented that since many of their practices seemed to fit in with the new research they would continue them; others felt that they had made major changes and were very satisfied with them.

Follow-up Survey

In Spring, 1986, participants were sent a letter and brief survey (Appendix B) asking them to indicate the degree to which their awareness of the research areas was still influencing their teaching practices. The five-point scale was weighted as follows: Extremely Important = 5 to Of No Importance = 1. They were asked to rate an area highly only if they had been able to put it in to practice. The summary of the responses in Table 4 was constructed when 70% of the surveys had been returned.

Table 4

Mean Ratings for the Five Research Areas: Follow-up Survey

Area	Rating
Schema Theory	4.77 (.59)
Directed Reading Activities (Includes questioning, teaching of strategies, and teaching in context	4.44 (.98)
Writing	4.11 (.76)
Story Grammar	4.00 (1.08)
Teaching Special Groups (e.g. Special Ed, LEP, Remedial)	4.00 (1.49)

As seen in Table 4, Schema Theory (4.77) clearly ranked as the most important research area still affecting the teaching practices of the respondents. More than half mentioned using semantic mapping or webbing before having students read; several said that schema activation had become an integral part of their content area lessons, particularly citing science and social studies.

Next in importance, with a 4.44 rating (Very to Extremely Important), was the area dealing with direct explicit teaching of reading strategies. Fifty percent said that the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) was their major approach to guiding students through text; several mentioned encouraging students to raise questions and become "active" readers who are aware of where answers can be found. There were also specific mentions of teaching skimming, scanning, summarizing, and question-answer-relationships (QARs).

Writing research was rated 4.11 or Very Important. A majority of the teachers commented that their students were keeping logs, journals, or writing folders as a result of their learning about the writing-as-process movement. While some report that their students were writing reactions to basal reader stories and trade books, others said that they have students writing in all content areas.

Story Grammar received a rating of 4.0 or Very Important. While several teachers commented that they based their post-reading comprehension questions

over narratives on a story grammar framework, over one third of the respondents said that they used story grammar as a basis for book reports. A few said that they approached their basal reader stories through a story grammar construct rather than follow the basal reader manual suggestions; they felt that this approach gave them and their students "more control" over the fiction stories encountered in their basals.

Teaching Special Populations received a 4.0 rating which was very dispersed (SD = 1.49). Several did not respond at all, indicating that this area "did not apply," or they rated it of little or no importance because they were teaching only developmental students and had no contact with special groups. Comments from those who did respond to this area ranged from "I use the same approaches I would with regular groups, but I give more examples, practice, and review" and "I use a variety of whole language, realistic materials that will appeal to their interests."

The survey information indicates that these teachers regard the research areas they were exposed to in this course as very important and that they have adapted their teaching practices to reflect the research even after their course work was ended.

Summary and Conclusions

This report has presented highlights from observational field notes, graduate action research, and opinion surveys of participants in a graduate reading course that attempted to link theory with practice. Students read the current research in teaching reading as the instructor visited each of their classes; all met in a seminar on a weekly basis to discuss the readings and instructional approach of the last teacher visited. Discussions focussed on what the teacher was doing that fit in with the research or what the teacher could do to move in that direction. From these sessions and the reaction papers written by all participants (including the instructor), the teachers had a blueprint to refine or change teaching practices.

The key seemed to be the classroom visit, during which time the instructor acted as consultant, demonstrating directly or just observing, suggesting, or raising questions. Often the participants failed to make the connection between what they were reading and hearing about in their graduate courses and their own teaching situation until the classroom visit which made them confront what they were doing day to day through the perspective of a "friendly"observer.

The survey responses showed that these teachers appreciated the visits and exchanges with peers and instructor; they indicated that they had refined perspectives and practices. The follow-up survey showed that, even a year or more after the course, they were still very aware of their learnings and were making real changes in their instructional practices. They appeared to be moving away from slavish adherence to basal reader manuals and taking control of their teaching situations.

In a recent article in the American Educator, Woodward laments the condition in which he found teachers, stating:

> Many of the teachers I observed followed their textbooks almost word for word...In the basal reading programs there appeared to be a strict adherence to a highly managed series of teaching and learning activities in the teacher's guides...it was rare for spontaneous activities to occur...There was little extended reading and comprehension-based reading, but there was lots of workbook activity" (1986, p. 28).

The teachers in this study certainly do not appear to be like those described by Woodward. They appear to know what they are doing when they help students learn to read and read to learn.

While it is common to find a seminar course attached to student teaching or other field activities in preservice programs, it is rare to find such components in graduate education programs for practitioners. At the graduate level, experienced teachers generally take their course work at the college, and the implementing of new ideas is left up to them. In order to help teachers at the graduate level to connect research/theory with practice, it is recommended that some course work carry a field component in which instructors visit their students in their classrooms as was done in the course described in this report.

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Appendix A

Course Evaluation Survey

Date _____

Evaluation Survey

Please help us to evaluate RLA 623 Practicum in Teaching Reading

I. Course Components

How helpful were the following course components?

	Extremely Helpful	Very Helpful	Helpful	Of Some Help	Not Helpful
1. Text: Comprehension Instruction (Duffy etal) Comments:	____	____	____	____	____
2. Text: Reading Comprehension (McNeil) Comments:	____	____	____	____	____
3. Class Sessions Comments:	____	____	____	____	____
4. Instructor's visits to observe you teach Comments:	____	____	____	____	____
5. Writing reaction papers to peers' lessons Comments:	____	____	____	____	____

II. Your Own Perceptions

	Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Degree	A Little	Not At All
To what degree do you think ...					
1. Your perception about reading comprehension has changed? Comments:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Your Instructional procedures for teaching reading have changed? Comments:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

III. Would you recommend this course to others?

Yes _____ Maybe _____ No _____

Thank you
The Reading-Language Arts Faculty

Appendix B

Follow-up Survey

The William Paterson College of New Jersey, Wayne, New Jersey 07470 • (201) 595-2331/2310

WPC

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

February 1986

Dear

Looking over recently completed research projects and the many materials accumulated from our course, Practicum in Teaching Reading, I have noticed that certain categories of research interests have been emerging. As a follow-up to our practicum course, I would like to know to what extent your knowledge about these areas has affected your teaching practices.

Please think about what you do when you work with students with text, and indicate the degree to which your awareness of the current research about each of the areas on the accompanying survey has influenced your practices. (Even though you know about and think an area is important, rate it highly only if you have been able to put it into actual practice). In the comments sections, give one or two examples of how you have been putting your research knowledge into practice. For example, if you have checked Schema Theory as Extremely Important, you might cite the use of semantic webbing activities before having students read a social studies text.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Joan T. Feeley

JTF:cmm

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Follow-Up Survey

Practicum in Teaching Reading

Research Area	Extremely Important	Very Important	Important	Of Some Importance	Of No Importance

Schema Theory
Comments:

Writing
Comments:

Story Grammar
Comments:

Directed Reading Activities
(Includes questioning, direct teaching of Strategies, and teaching in context)
Comments:

Teaching Special Groups
(e.g., Comp Ed., ESL, SPED)
Comments: